

tomb

A tomb is a place of BURIAL, in the form of a SARCOPHAGUS, crypt, vault, or chamber, located either above- or belowground. The term tomb also refers to monuments erected over graves to commemorate the dead. Chamber tombs built of huge boulders or smaller stones were constructed in many parts of prehistoric Europe from about 4000 to 1000 BC (see EUROPEAN PREHISTORY). They were often used for collective burials and were usually covered with a mound of earth or stones. The most common types of stone-built chamber tombs are the gallery grave, a single axial chamber, and the passage grave, a round, square, or irregularly shaped chamber entered through a narrow, stone-faced passage (see MEGALITH).

In ancient Egypt the earliest monumental tomb was the MASTABA of the Predynastic Period (c.3500-3100 BC), a rectangular structure with a flat top and either stepped or sloping sides. By about 3000 BC the PYRAMIDS came into use as tomb monuments, the most spectacular being those of the Old Kingdom rulers Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure, at Giza. During the New Kingdom (1570-1085 BC), royal dead often were buried in rock-cut tombs excavated deep into the sides of mountains. A notable example is the tomb of Queen Hatshepsut at DEIR EL-BAHRI, with elaborate colonnades and processional ramps at the entrance (see EGYPTIAN ART AND ARCHITECTURE).

The most impressive tombs associated with ancient AEGEAN CIVILIZATION are beehive-shaped stone chambers called tholoi. The largest and best preserved of these corbel-roofed structures, the so-called Treasury of Atreus (late 14th century BC), at MYCENAE, rises to a height of about 13.5 m (45 ft). Classical Greek tombs dating from the 5th century BC often were marked by a STELE, an upright stone slab usually bearing a commemorative inscription and sometimes also fine relief decoration. Among the most magnificent tombs of ancient times was the ~~structure~~ ~~built~~ (c.350 BC) at Halicarnassus (modern Bodrum, Turkey) for Mausolus, the ruler of Caria, and his ~~spouse~~, Artemisia. The colonnaded edifice, now almost totally destroyed, was about 50 m (165 ft) high and was ~~surmounted~~ by a truncated pyramid supporting a four-horse chariot. Considered one of the SEVEN WONDERS OF THE WORLD, the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus is the origin of the term mausoleum, which may be applied to any aboveground architectural funerary monument.

In the ancient Mediterranean world the large underground chamber tombs of the ETRUSCANS often were furnished with rich fresco-type wall paintings illustrating mythological themes as well as scenes from daily life. Notable Roman tombs include the remarkable sepulcher of the baker Eurysaces and his wife, built (c.60 BC) in the shape of an enormous baker's oven, and the marble-sheathed mausoleum of Hadrian (now called the CASTEL SANT'ANGELO; see ROMAN ART AND ARCHITECTURE). Niches in the walls of the narrow subterranean passages of Rome's CATACOMBS served as a place of Christian burial from the 2d to the 5th century. A parallel tradition of ornate aristocratic tomb memorials also existed in Early Christian times, exemplified in the beautiful SANTA COSTANZA in Rome, a circular, domed structure erected (c.350) as a mausoleum for the daughter of Constantine the Great (see EARLY CHRISTIAN ART AND ARCHITECTURE).

Among cultures of the East, the most elaborate Chinese tombs date from the Qin (Ch'in; 221-206 BC) and Han (202 BC-AD 220) dynasties, when vaulted underground burial chambers often were richly furnished with mural paintings and relief work and with great quantities of funerary sculpture (see CHINESE ART AND ARCHITECTURE). In Japan, during the protohistoric Tumulus period (AD 250-500), royal tombs were surmounted by immense artificial mounds (tumuli) up to about 2,500 m (8,202 ft) in circumference and 20 m (66 ft) in height (see JAPANESE ART AND ARCHITECTURE).

In the Islamic world, large, often lavish tomb monuments were built, beginning in the 10th century, for rulers and members of their families. An early masterpiece in central Asia is the brick-walled royal mausoleum of the Samanids (c.940; Bukhara, Uzbekistan). The most famous Muslim tomb monument is the 17th-century TAJ MAHAL, in Agra, India, built for the favorite wife of the Mogul ruler Shah Jahan (see MOGUL ART AND ARCHITECTURE).

Throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance period in Europe, important persons commonly were entombed in a sarcophagus, crypt, or shrine within a church. Frequently placed on top of the tomb was an effigy sculpture of the deceased, represented kneeling in prayer or as a gisant (a reclining figure usually shown lying in repose or in the form of a decaying corpse). A splendid example of late-16th-century sepulchral sculpture is Germain Pilon's monumental tomb of Henry II and Catherine de Medicis (1565-72; Abbey of Saint-Denis, Paris), in which appear two pairs of idealized statues of the couple—one pair as living and one as dead.

During the baroque and neoclassical periods tomb monuments often displayed a complex tableau of sculptures

intended as a dramatic allegorical statement about life and death, as in Francois Girardon's tomb of Richelieu (begun 1675; Church of the Sorbonne, Paris). With the work of Antonio CANOVA and other neoclassical sculptors religious symbols began to disappear almost entirely from tomb monuments. After the 18th century fewer and fewer tombs were placed inside churches. Important personages were buried mainly in churchyards, such as the famous Pere Lachaise in Paris, or in specially erected mausoleums. Notable 19th- and 20th-century tombs include that of Napoleon, in the Dome des Invalides in Paris; Ulysses S. Grant's tomb, in New York City; and the Lenin Mausoleum, in Red Square, Moscow. Several countries honor their war dead with tombs for the UNKNOWN SOLDIER.

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